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# Feathered Facts

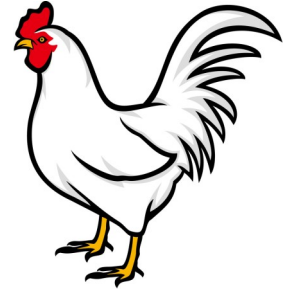
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## Ask the Expert—Caponization

This month's question concerns caponization of cockerels (male chicken). **What is caponization and why is/was it traditionally done?**



Over the past couple of months, I have received more than a few questions regarding caponization of cockerels. Caponization is the process of surgical castration of a male chicken. As a result of the removal of the testes, the cockerel fails to develop certain male characteristics. These will include cessation of development in the comb and wattles, a more docile nature, and the extended growth of the tail and saddle feathers.

Caponization has been traced back to many ancient cultures including China, Rome and Greece. The main reason that this procedure was done is to allow the capons to grow and develop for a longer period of time without the bird becoming sexually mature. The practice of castration for this effect is also performed on other meat animals such as cattle (to make steers). The meat from the male birds tend to become tougher and stringier if they are used for meat production after they have reached sexual maturity. Because poultry in ancient times grew more slowly than today's chickens, caponization was performed to get a larger, fatter bird on the table.

Caponization is considered a major surgical procedure for the bird. Male birds that undergo this process are typically between two and four weeks of age. Since the testes of the cockerel are located within the body cavity, an incision has to be made to reach the testes to remove them. This incision is typically performed without anesthetic for the animal. It is also important to note that there are major blood vessels located near the testes, along with the kidneys. The person performing the caponization has to be very skilled or they may cause kidney damage or rupture a blood vessel which will cause the bird to die. Professionals who caponize birds may have a low mortality rate for the birds, but those that are not highly experienced in the procedure should expect losses of 15% and higher. There is also the possibility that all of the testicular material may not be removed. In this case, called a 'slip', the bird will still produce testosterone and will be unfit as a capon.

It is important to remember that this procedure was developed in ancient times when poultry had very slow growth rates and high feed conversions. The poultry that we have available to us today have dramatically increased growth rates and much better feed conversion rates than those birds of yesteryear. With today's breeds, it is completely possible to get a capon-sized bird (10 to 12 lbs.) well before the bird reaches sexual maturity. It will also be difficult to find a professional to teach the procedure and losses should be expected.

There are more than 25 billion chickens on planet Earth. That's around 3 chickens for every human and more than any other bird species.

Believe it or not, there is a scientific name for the fear of chickens; it is called Alektorophobia

## Florida Limited Poultry and Egg Farm Operation

With the increased interest in backyard poultry in Florida, there was a need to simplify the rules and regulations regarding the sale of eggs and minimally processed poultry from small operations. In 2014, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) adopted rule 5K-4.033, the *Limited Poultry and Egg Farm Operation* rule, which governs the sale of eggs and minimally processed poultry from permitted operations. The full rule can be found at <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/RuleNo.asp?title=FOOD&ID=5K-4.033>. Information from FDACS concerning the rule can be found at <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Food-Safety/Consumer-Resources/Food-Inspections/Poultry-and-Egg-Grading/Limited-Poultry-and-Egg-Farm-Operation-Permit>. FDACS also has a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document about the rule located at [http://www.freshfromflorida.com/content/download/37551/848256/FDACS\\_-2000Rev.0614.pdf](http://www.freshfromflorida.com/content/download/37551/848256/FDACS_-2000Rev.0614.pdf). Listed below are some important points to remember if you are planning to produce poultry and/or eggs under this rule. It is also important to note that this rule does not supersede local ordinances regarding the raising of poultry in residential areas. If you have questions about the zoning of your property, please contact your local Zoning Office.

- A *Limited Poultry and Egg Farm Operation* is defined as a farm based food establishment which directly produces and offers dressed poultry or whole eggs for sale. No additional processing or food preparation of such poultry or shell eggs is allowed under this permit category.
- Small farm operators in this category are limited in flock sizes:
  - 1,000 laying hens annually for production & sale of shell eggs
  - 20,000 poultry for the production and sale of dressed carcasses
  - This equates to the sale of up to 30 dozen eggs and/or 384 dressed poultry within a one week timespan.
- The annual permit fee is \$100 + a \$10 epidemiological surcharge.
- This permit allows exemption from minimum building standards.
- There is no certified food manager required for permitted operations.
- *Limited Poultry and Egg Farm* operators may only sell products within the State of Florida. There are no interstate or wholesale sales allowed.
- Internet advertising and promotion of *Limited Poultry and Egg Farm Operation* products is allowed. Orders are also allowed to be placed over the internet. However, the products must be picked up at one of the following:
  - Permitted Farm Location
  - Roadside Stand
  - Farmer's Market or similar Open-Air Market
  - Direct Delivery to the consumer.

Orders cannot be mailed or delivered in any other manner than listed above.

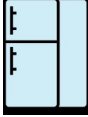



## Florida Limited Poultry and Egg Farm Operation

- Sales and deliveries of poultry or eggs can only be performed by:
  - The Permitted Farm Operator
  - A direct family member of the Permitted Farm Operator
  - An employee of the Permitted Farm Operator
  - Another Permitted Farm Operator
- No agricultural brokers or agents are allowed to facilitate sales or deliveries.
- Minimally processed poultry and eggs from a permitted operation may be sold directly to hotels, restaurants, and similar institutions for the preparation of meals that are sold directly to consumers.
- Birds that are considered poultry for this rule and permit are:
  - Chicken, Turkey, Duck, Goose, Guinea Fowl, Quail
- Labeling is required for both fresh egg sales and processed poultry produced under this rule and permit:
  - For eggs: a placard shall be placed at the point of sale stating the following: ***These eggs have not been graded as to quality and weight.*** The displayed placard must be at least 7 inches by 7 inches in size.
  - For processed poultry: the immediate packaging must contain the following: 1) the processor's name, 2) the farm address, 3) the statement ***Exempt P.L. 90-492***, and 4) a safe handling instructions label (see example on page 4).
- There are temperature requirements when selling fresh eggs. The eggs shall be maintained at 45°F from the processing facility to the point of sale. Coolers are sufficient as long as the eggs are maintained at the correct temperature.
- Eggs sold under this permit must be sold in flats or in bulk. **THEY CANNOT BE SOLD IN CARTONS.**
- Eggs sold under this rule must be washed. Restricted or dirty eggs cannot be sold for human consumption. There are specific guidelines for washings eggs. They can be found at <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/content/download/23982/486665/SellFarmFreshEggs.pdf>.
- There are temperature requirements to sell dressed poultry. The carcasses must be maintained at 41°F or below. The carcasses must also be sold under such conditions that will prevent contamination and will protect against undesirable deterioration of the product and container. The chicken feet or "paws" can be sold under this rule. The same temperature requirements apply.
- This rule does not govern the sale of live chicken or poultry.
- Check with your local government for any additional rules that they may have.
- This rule does not allow you to claim your product as organic. Organic certification is overseen by the USDA. You can obtain information about becoming certified organic by consulting the USDA website at <http://www.usda.gov> or call their information hotline at (202) 720-2791
- Farms that are permitted under this rule cannot serve as a commissary.
- Farms that are permitted under this rule are allowed to sell their products in multiple locations at the same time provided that they follow the rules for sales as outlined in the rule (see previous page).

Figure 1. Example of a *Safe Handling Instructions* label.

# Safe Handling Instructions

Some food products may contain bacteria that could cause illness if the product is mishandled or cooked improperly. For your protection, follow these safe handling instructions.

	Keep refrigerated or frozen. Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.
	Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods. Wash working surfaces (including cutting boards), utensils, and hands after
	Cook thoroughly.
	Keep hot foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.

## Additional Ask the Expert

This additional question relates to egg production: **Do I need a rooster with my hens for them to lay eggs?**

The short answer to this question is: No. Roosters are not necessary for the hen to lay eggs. Once she reaches sexual maturity, she will begin the process whether or not there is a rooster present. The catch to this question is, do you want to be able to hatch out your own chicks from your flock? If the answer to this question is yes, then you will need a rooster with the hens to fertilize the eggs. One rooster is enough for every 4 to 8 hens that you have.

If you have a question for the expert, email it to [baker@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:baker@ifas.ufl.edu).



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